

Life's Paradox

uncommon reflections of life matters

The 7 R's of Parenting

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Respect

Respect is not automatic. It is earned. In order for our children to respect us, we have to show them respect.

For example, how often have we promised our children a compelling reward and then renege on it, at our convenience. Eg I have heard of carers telling their wards: “when you have packed up your toys, we will go for a walk.” So the kids do get organized, and then get told: “it’s gotten too dark now. Maybe another day.” Without even an acknowledgement of how well they have fulfilled their part of the bargain! It is not fair!

Is it any wonder that communications start to deteriorate as the years start to roll by because we grown-ups do not seem to have any self-respect of simply just keeping our word!

Being our word is a simple way of showing respect. Sure, there are times when plans need to be changed due to an emergency. Again, the children at least deserve an explanation of how things have now changed – and to postpone a plan – perhaps with their input of when, what or how they would like it made up. Eg in the example about it getting too dark to go out for the promised walk – how about showing your appreciation for their efforts in keeping up their part of the deal, and then asking – what else can we do instead of the walk as it is getting too dark and dangerous to go out? Shall we postpone it to first thing the next day? Or would we prefer to do something indoors together now – like say a game of “Monopoly” by the fire?

Then there is self-respect of standing up for what we believe in and being a role model. Eg we may say we need to hold honesty as a high value, and then when we get



pulled up by the traffic police for speeding, we tell a fib of how fast we were going – in full earshot of our little ones!

Rules

Boundaries are important to all of us. When these are clearly delineated, it allows for independence.

Freedom and self-discipline are the two sides of the same coin. We need to have both happening at the same time to achieve independence and fulfillment. How?

If we were given a few simple rules to follow, then we know our limits in that context. So we can act independently within those confines knowing that we do not have to keep checking with the person-in-charge, whether it is a parent, a nanny/caregiver, teacher.

As an example: I remember “observing” at my children’s pre-school and kindergarten. It is the Montessori School philosophy to encourage parents/carers to come and “observe” prior entry and during the duration of the children’s enrolment in the school. As I sat down, I was given a one-page guideline as to how to conduct myself during the 30 minutes I had been allocated. I welcomed this little succinct document as I was able to be like the metaphorical “fly on the wall” as the children continued with their work undisturbed.

Knowing the “rules” allowed me not to intrude on the children’s work space in the very limited time I was there. Eg I was not allowed to speak to any of the children unless they came up to me to initiate the conversation. (I discovered later that the culture in the classroom is not to seek to ask an adult questions – especially a visitor! – and to attempt to do things on their own first. “Help me help myself” is a great motto in the school.)

Keeping to my guidelines, I was able to efficiently and effectively observe the many goings-on in this class of 2 dozen or so 3-6 year olds, which gave me a good snapshot of the philosophy of the school. There was amazing industry, quiet focus, a respect for each other’s work and the mentoring of the younger ones by the older children. The directress (not termed a “teacher”) floated amongst them doing her presentations (not “lessons”).

Some simple rules such as: let each person focus on their own work without being disturbed; join in only if invited; all unfinished work to be labelled with person’s name so they can return to it the following day; when work is completed, all implements must be put back exactly where you found it to respect the next person’s ease of using them.



What was strongly illustrated is the children's understanding of these rules that were clearly laid down and consistently upheld by not just the directress and her assistants, but the children of all ages.

All we need is rules that are clear and simple and consistently applied. Knowing the boundaries gives us the freedom to act without having to constantly check in – which is easily the case if there were no set rules, or they keep changing all the time!

It is vitally important that we set rules for ourselves that we are seen to observe as well. How often do we set rules about say, being on time for a meal, and then we consistently run late from our work for our dinner with the family!

Routine

There is much to be said for having options and flexibility to change things when necessity dictates.

Like consistent rules, nothing beats a regular routine so we do not occupy our minds trying to re-invent how we do things all the time. It allows for independence from having to check with a supervisor every time.

Let's say we change our meal times willy nilly with a small child – that would be very confusing as the child does not know how much to eat. If he eats too much, and is fed sooner than expected, he will be made to experience force feeding. If he does not eat enough and the next meal comes too far in between, you will have a very whiny grumpy child. What makes it worse if the child is too young to verbalize or signal (other than crying and whimpering) his/her needs.

Routine can give the young child a sense of control, and allows him/her to make relatively independent choices of say, how much to eat, if they can gauge when the next meal is likely to come. (Or when one is forced to sleep!)

Routine frees our creativity to improve things. If we are not thinking of every step in our daily living, it gives us the freedom to explore and focus specifically on one thing at a time to learn, develop or improve. Eg if the child knows where his favourite book is all the time and can get back to it any time, s/he is more likely to look for other books/activities to do with that security in mind.

As for being a role model in our lives, do we take time to schedule a routine for ourselves? Do we make "me"- time where we schedule 2-3 times of gym for ourselves, and a regular time to check emails, or a time to just watch the news without interruption? If our children observe that we have a routine, they will respect our time more too.

Running it

This is really about management. Getting organized – even if it is just in your mind – is important. This allows us to be consistent.

Let's go look at some of these things:

- ? Do you know what sort of a parent you'd ideally like to be?
- ? What is your intention in parenting?
- ? Are you aware of your beliefs and values?
- ? Can you “walk your talk”, “live your values”, “role model” it to your family?
- ? Do you have a “Civil Code” of behaviour and expectations with a consistent set of consequences?
- ? Are there ways to celebrate achievement, to inspire ambition, to count every little win in your family's life?
- ? Have you shared your Vision, Values and Mission in life with your family?
- ? Is it strictly authoritarian Top Down Management? Or is it collaborative empowerment? Perhaps a mixture depending on ages of children?
- ? What is your identity in the Parenting role: Dictator? Mentor? Teacher? Counsellor? Consultant? Therapist? Rescuer? Facilitator? Coach? Director? Leader? Follower? Equal?

Why do we mostly let life run us with regard to families instead of putting some structure in place so everybody knows where we are going and what we care about?

If we do not put structure into place of how we ideally like things to be, we end up letting life run us. Sure, there is much to be said for spontaneity and seeing what surprises there are in store. However, how would you know the great unexpected if you did not have expectations of how it should be in the first place?

Manage your self before everybody else does!

Review & Reflect

This is just as important as the “doing” to realize our Life Plan through our actions. It is just as important, if not more so, to be able to step back and check now and again on a regular basis where we are at.

Perhaps it is about stepping away from an emotionally charged experience – which is a common occurrence with being around our loved ones. It allows us to take the charge out of extremely negative (and even positive) experiences which can blind us. We all know what it is like to be yelled at as kids say, to finish our school assignment rather than abandoning it to run off to a party. If we took the time to step back and



look at the situation, and instead of slamming the door on mum as she's screaming at us, what would it be like if we sat down and negotiated a "time-out" for relaxation so we can be more efficient in our project upon our return? (Sketching her our intended timeline for completion of the project in the process as we waltz out the door!)

It could be just a way of stepping back and counting (rather than discounting) all the things (no matter how miniscule) that we have achieved or won during the day. I remember nagging my son about letting his violin practice slide during the holidays. What my scotoma was on is that fact that he had been spending a lot of quality time with his younger sister showing her the beauty of "Game Boy". Look I am not about to debate the benefits and disadvantages of music practice over those couch-potato-RSI-developing toys (you can tell I am polarized against!!). What I failed to count is the beautiful relationship he is building with his sibling.

Reviewing and reflecting allows us to take stock of where we are at and steering towards where we wish to go. It's a checkpoint – where one realigns, changes course or celebrate being on track or better!

Remember if we can set up simple ways of celebrating our own little achievements, it becomes natural for our children to do the same for themselves. We usually do celebrate the artworks that our children bring home by putting it on the fridge, or congratulating them. Have you announced your ecstasy (or challenging learnings) in completing a project well (or not as well as you'd like) that day and sharing it at the table with your family at dinner? By doing that constantly, and inviting everyone to share their wins (and awareness of new learnings) of the day, they learn to proactively acknowledge their own progress and achievements rather than wait for external validation from others first.

Have you celebrated your learnings lately?

Re-organize

This is really the next step after having your R&R (you can consider it Rest & Relaxation – or Review and Reflect above!)

How often have we gotten stuck in the rut of an old Routine (yes, I know I am into Routines – as long as they continue to serve us), and we have become too comfortable in it. If we took time to review our Life Plan and Vision more often than once after we drafted it in the first place eighteen months ago (or more like eighteen years ago!), we may find that the children have grown up and left the nest, and our plans should have changed but haven't!



When you wish to re-visit and re-organize your Personal and Family Plan is entirely up to you. All I am adamant about is that it is done regularly, individually and also shared/communicated collaboratively with significant others.

When did you last dust out the cobwebs of that living document you drafted and left on the shelf? If you have re-visited it, did you share it with someone you love so they can be a part of it as well as support you in realizing it?

Role modeling

This is the central core of this program. Walk Your Talk. Live Your Values. To thine self be true.

If you expect your children to have fulfilled their dreams, live their passions and reach their highest potential, then you have got to do the same.

Behaviour is the highest form of communication. If we do not live what we say, then don't say it. You cannot tell the next generation how to live their lives. You show them by example. Eg. How many of us expect our kids to constantly practice their piano concertos by Mozart and regularly listen to their Suzuki violin pieces on CD, so they can excel at making beautiful music? Yet some of us have never attempted to play even the recorder or sing a single Christmas Carol, or attend a classical music concert, let alone tune in to classical music on the radio, or own a CD with a single piece of that genre of music in our collection! Are we not sending incongruent messages to our young ones?

The clearer you are about your beliefs and values, and the self-awareness of your identity and what it means to you, the better you will be to communicate that to your family.

What have you done continuously to improve your self awareness and to share that with those you love every day of your life?

Live your Voice – Walk your talk

Live your Vision – Be your word

Live your Values – To thine self be true

About the Author: **Dr Yvonne Sum** is a pioneer in Parent Leadership coaching. She is on a quest to co-create joyful learning partnerships between parents and children to simultaneously bring out each other's authentic best. She inspires parents to learn from our children mirroring to us what we most need to learn about ourselves and vice-versa. Through her series of **Transformational Leadership Challenge™ (TLC)** programs, Dr Sum is committed to transform leaders of tomorrow today by highlighting family values and celebrating parents as role models and heroes in life who proactively unleash our children's potential through self actualization, intentional living and powerful leadership centred on love and high purpose. She expresses this passion to bring out our authentic best through her roles as an international speaker, writer, transformational corporate facilitator, executive and parent Meta-Coach, Neuro Linguistic Programming trainer, business woman, wife and mother. Please visit www.dryvonesum.com for more information.